

Nightmares: A Short Horror Film

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

By

Sarah James

Thesis Advisor

Professor Kathryn S. Gardiner

**Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana**

April 2018

Expected Date of Graduation

May 2018

Abstract:

Horror films are often recognized as the easiest way to break into the film industry, as they are relatively cheap to make, however, creating a horror movie with a well thought out and thought provoking story line is difficult. I have always been a fan of the horror movies that make me think, that reflect ideas that are truly terrifying: isolation, loneliness, guilt, madness. In this script I explore the aftermath of losing someone to suicide, the complications of mental illness, and the emotions that pass through someone who doesn't quite know how to mourn. I also created a prototype movie poster, concept art, and other preproduction documents could be utilized if this film were to be produced in the future.

Acknowledgments:

I would like to thank Professor Kathryn Gardiner for all her help and understanding as I attempted to create this story. Her assistance has helped me become a better writer, prospective filmmaker, student, and storyteller, and through her guidance I have created something I am proud of.

I would also like to thank Michael and Matthew for their constant encouragement and nights of distressing by playing *Halo*, Sandy and Emily for their excellent advice, and to my mother, Jeanne, for holding me accountable and helping me stay calm in moments of stress. I couldn't have done this without you.

Table of Contents

Process Analysis Statement	1
<i>Nightmares</i>	4
Treatment	31
Movie Poster Prototype	32
Storyboards	33
Documentation of Sources	36
Appendices	37

Process Analysis Statement

When first thinking about what I wanted to do for my Honors Thesis, I came to the conclusion that I wanted to write a screenplay, as it would be the perfect culmination of my major in Telecommunications, and my major in Creative Writing. However, figuring out exactly what I wanted to tell in my story proved to be difficult. I spent months brainstorming different ideas for scripts, from a short romantic comedy, to a feature length investigative drama. I landed on a horror film, as I am a fan of the horror genre and believe writing a horror film that does more than rely on cheap scares and makes the audience think is a challenge.

I was inspired by the film, *The Babadook*, when I began brainstorming ideas for my short horror film. In *The Babadook*, the monster is a physical representation of the main character's grief, and it's only when she faces her grief head on that the monster is calmed. My plan was to combine the element of a physical representation of an abstract concept with my own personal struggles with mental illness, and came up with the idea of a creature that is a manifestation of depression. My mental illness has been something I have dealt with for many years, but came to a head at the beginning of the fall semester

in 2017. Senior year overwhelmed me, and it became increasingly difficult to do basic things, like eat or take a shower.

However, the past year of hardships has also been a fuel for me and my creative endeavors, and a lot of what I was struggling with ended up being an inspiration for this script.

This thesis went through multiple iterations of what the end product would be. My original plan for my thesis also included shooting and editing a short trailer for the film, with the goal of showcasing the skills I learned through the TCOM department at Ball State University. However, lack of time and my increasing mental illness caused me to shift around what I wanted my thesis to be, and instead, I decided on supplying a variety of preproduction documents (storyboards, concept art, treatment) with the goal of being prepared to shoot this film if I ever had the opportunity to, or present to an industry insider. I also wanted to use the skills I had learned in the Adobe creative suite by creating a movie poster for the film. This way, I could still utilize skills from my TCOM degree and graduate with a script and beginning stages of producing a short film.

This script had three different drafts, and if I were to continue with this project, there would be plenty more. The

first draft included the bare bones, a mere skeleton of a story with bland characters not fully realized. In the second draft, I personalized the dialogue, made Daniel a bit more volatile, and made some changes to the ending that helped Robyn's character grow. And in the third draft, I had some minor formatting issues to fix, and built up the world and the relationships between the characters. I added more description to the creature in order to get the image in my head on the page, and made a few more alterations to the ending in order to leave it ambiguous.

If I ever get the opportunity to produce this film, I hope it speaks to those with mental illness, and lets others know that no bout of depression or anxiety is ever the same. Sometimes, you may think you can defeat your demons, and that once you do, life will be smooth sailing from there on out, but if I've learned anything this semester it's this: mental illness is a shape-shifting beast that does not ever truly disappear. It morphs into something different and new every day, and you must always be willing to adapt and fight it if you ever want to win. I hope this notion comes across in *Nightmares*, and that those struggling with mental illness in any capacity can find themselves in this script.

NIGHTMARES

Written by

Sarah James

DARKNESS.

Muffled screams and urgent whispers swirl softly. Nothing is distinguishable. A young girl's voice stands out, screaming, building, until...

SCENE 1

*

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING

*

DANIEL's eyes snap open. The scream is replaced by Daniel's heavy breathing.

Daniel, 24, skinny, pale brunette, blinks repeatedly as an alarm clock fades in. Daniel presses at his eyes with the heels of hands, glances at his alarm clock, and shuts it off. He sits up slightly and reaches for the journal and pen sitting next to his alarm clock. He rubs his eyes, flips the journal open, and uncaps the pen.

He writes "I dreamt about Emily again. Her screaming was louder this time." Daniel shuts the journal and tosses it to the edge of his bed.

INT. BATHROOM - MORNING

Daniel wipes the steam away from the bathroom mirror and stares at his reflection.

COUNSELOR (V.O.)

How have you been Daniel?

Daniel runs his fingers through his damp hair. He turns on the faucet and begins to wash his face.

DANIEL (V.O.)

Fine, I guess.

Daniel splashes his face with water and dries it with a towel. He runs his fingers through his hair again.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Daniel eats a bowl of cereal while looking at his laptop. Dishes are piled up in the sink. Trash is scattered across the kitchen. A pot of coffee brews.

COUNSELOR (V.O.)

Still having the nightmares?

Daniel scrolls through pictures of him and EMILY, 17, on his laptop. One of Emily, a broad shouldered brunette, standing in a swimsuit holding a medal, her arm draped around Daniel.

Another of Emily on Daniel's back at a football game, black lines of face paint on their cheeks. Emily looks distracted, only giving a half smile.

Another of Daniel, Emily, and ROBYN, an olive skinned girl with long black hair, standing arm in arm with each other at a state fair. Daniel and Robyn have massive smiles; Emily's smile is forced. There are bags under her eyes, and she's much skinnier than the previous photos.

DANIEL (V.O.)
(Aggressive)
It's always the same. She's
screaming, but I can't help her.

EXT. BUS STOP - DAY

Daniel waits outside with his hands in his coat pockets. He wears a scarf and hat. He stares at the ground, kicking a pebble.

COUNSELOR (V.O.)
I see. Have you been writing the
dreams down?

INT. BUS - DAY

Daniel stares out the bus window as it drives towards campus.

DANIEL (V.O.)
Yes. Doesn't help any.

The bus stops, and Daniel gets up to leave.

EXT. CAMPUS - DAY

Daniel shoves his hands in his pockets and walks, eyes never leaving the ground.

COUNSELOR (V.O.)
Have you told your parents about
these nightmares yet?

Daniel removes his phone from his pocket. He has a missed call from Robyn.

DANIEL (V.O.)
Of course not. Robyn is still the
only one who knows, and even then
it's not the full fuckin story.

Daniel shakes his head and puts his phone back in his pocket.

COUNSELOR (V.O.)
How are your parents dealing with
the situation? Any better?

INT. COUNSELOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Daniel sits on a couch against the wall. His coat, scarf, hat, and backpack all rest at his feet. The COUNSELOR, middle aged woman with blonde hair pulled in a tight bun, sits behind a desk looking at Daniel, her fingers poised on her computer keyboard. Daniel looks at his shoes, a hole is growing in his left shoe by his big toe.

DANIEL
They tell me they're doing better,
but I doubt that's true.
(A beat)
It's funny, I think they're more
worried about me than they're sad
about Emily.

The Counselor types notes while maintaining eye contact with Daniel.

Her office is completely lavender: lavender couch, lavender walls, lavender curtains, lavender blanket, lavender fake flowers sitting on a glass table. She even wears a lavender scarf with her black sweater. It's a bit unnerving.

She nods a few times, finishes her typing, and rests her arms on her desk.

COUNSELOR
And what about you?

DANIEL
Me?

COUNSELOR
Are you more worried about
yourself? Or sad about Emily?

Daniel stands up and starts pacing, avoiding the glass table in front of the couch.

He stops and stares at a poster of a horse with the caption "Your Mind is What You Make It," then turns his attention to the three diplomas displayed proudly on the wall.

He shakes his head, continues pacing. He scratches at his left arm.

DANIEL

What's that supposed to mean?

The Counselor returns to her computer to type notes.

COUNSELOR

You've been coming to counseling for a few weeks now, even though you lost your sister months ago. Are you here because you don't know how to grieve? Is it because you can't come to terms with the fact that she took her own life?

DANIEL

No, I'm here because these nightmares are fuckin tearing me apart!

Daniel stops pacing and places his hands on the counselor's desk aggressively.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

Emily's the one who decided to jump off a parking garage! I know that, I've mourned her. But my brain won't shut up and I'm just trying to sleep so I can fuckin graduate!

Daniel retreats from the desk and stares at his feet, suddenly feeling guilty. He sits back down on the couch.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

Shit, maybe that means I am more concerned about me...

Daniel looks at the counselor expectantly: are you disappointed yet? The Counselor stops typing.

COUNSELOR

Your sister's mental illness is not the same as your own. What's done is done, and I'm here to help you in any way I can.

Daniel looks at the counselor quizzically and then shakes his head. Whatever.

The counselor quickly types something up, and then turns to Daniel smiling.

COUNSELOR (CONT'D)

I can write you a prescription if you'd like. Something to help you sleep.

DANIEL

Okay.

The counselor clicks a few things on her computer. DING. The order went through, the counselor smiles.

COUNSELOR

And know that it's okay to worry about yourself, but it's also okay to still be upset about Emily. These nightmares may be trying to tell you something.

(a beat)

Maybe you feel as if you should've been able to help her.

SCENE 2

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

The last sentence of what the Counselor had to say echoes as Daniel lies in bed staring at the ceiling. His laptop sits on the foot of his bed. His brand new bottle of pills sits on the nightstand. Robyn knocks on the open door.

Robyn is out of focus this whole time, her voice seems distant.

ROBYN

You won't believe the kind of day I had! Four different men came in with things stuck up their asses, and every single one of them was given to me.

Daniel doesn't make eye contact, continues staring.

DANIEL

Cool

ROBYN

I mean I guess that's what I get for being the new nurse, but really?

(MORE)

ROBYN (CONT'D)

No one else could have gotten the
jar of jelly out of his rectum?

Robyn takes off her jacket and purse and throws them on the
floor. Daniel closes his eyes and concentrates on breathing,
in through the nose, out through the mouth.

Robyn sighs, her efforts at normal conversation aren't
helping.

ROBYN (CONT'D)

How did your appointment go?

Daniel's eyes snap open: so much for focusing on breathing.

DANIEL

Fine. I got pills this time.

Daniel rolls over on his side, facing away from Robyn,
looking at the bottle of pills. Robyn sits on the foot of the
bed, resting her hand on Daniel's leg.

ROBYN

Well that's a step. Has the
counselor been helpful?

DANIEL

Honestly? I don't know.

Daniel sits up slightly, snatching the dream journal from his
night stand. He flips through the pages quickly, but glimpses
of the words "Emily," "same nightmare," "screaming," and
"again" can be seen. There are several pages filled with
similar entries.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

She just asks me the same stupid
questions and gives the same stupid
advice. Write in the journal. Clear
your head before you sleep. Keep
track of the nightmares. Don't
blame yourself for Emily's suicide.

Daniel scratches at his left arm, his breathing quickens. He
snaps the dream journal shut, banging it against his head

ROBYN

Do you blame yourself for Emily's
suicide?

Daniel chucks the journal across the room. It lands outside
the bedroom door with an unimpressive thud.

DANIEL
(Yelling)
And what if I do?

He turns sharply to face Robyn, glaring: the fuck did you just say? This is the first time he's really looked at her since the conversation started.

Robyn has her hair pulled up in a messy bun, her hair falls all over the place. She has on scrubs that are covered in a variety of stains. Dark circles are under her eyes. It's clear that she's had a long day. She's taken aback by Daniel's outburst.

Daniel realizes his mistake. He looks down at his hands, ashamed.

DANIEL (CONT'D)
I'm sorry.

ROBYN
It's alright.

Robyn kicks off her white sneakers, and climbs in the bed next to Daniel. Daniel rests his head on Robyn's lap. She plays with his hair as he calms down.

ROBYN (CONT'D)
Can you answer my question though?

Daniel's quiet for a moment. He opens his mouth as if to say something, then reconsiders.

ROBYN (CONT'D)
You know it isn't your fault, right?

Daniel shakes his head, chuckling to himself: yeah right.

DANIEL
I really want to believe that, but honestly, I feel like I let Emily down. I could've been there for her.

ROBYN
We were both there for her. I'm supposed to be the medical professional here and even I didn't see how much she was hurting.

DANIEL
Still, I was her brother.

ROBYN

I know you tried to be there. You were there for her as much as you could be.

Daniel sits up suddenly, angry again.

DANIEL

No I wasn't! She tried to tell me she needed help and I didn't care!

Daniel realizes that he's overstated, and tries to move on before Robyn realizes. He gets out of the bed and puts on shoes.

ROBYN

What do you mean she told you she needed help? Did she talk to you before...

Daniel grabs a sweatshirt off the floor and aggressively puts it on. It's clear he doesn't want to continue the conversation.

DANIEL

I'm getting some air. Don't wait for me.

Daniel leaves the room. Robyn sighs, pulling her hair out of her bun and rubbing her temples.

SCENE 3

EXT. CITY STREET - DUSK

Daniel walks down a busy sidewalk. People around him seem cheerful, completely ignoring him. He's lost in thought.

EMILY (V.O.)

I don't know how much longer I can do this.

Daniel shakes his head, stopping outside a bar. He pauses.

EMILY (V.O.)

Daniel, I don't know why this is happening to me.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - FLASHBACK

Daniel walks by the doorway of Emily's bedroom, backpack slung over one shoulder. Emily sits on the floor in sweatpants and a T-shirt. Her hair is knotted in a nest on her head. Her face is gaunt, her skin is pale. She hasn't been taking care of herself.

Emily opens her mouth, saying something that we do not hear. She sound muted, as if underwater.

Daniel backtracks and returns to the door, staying as far away from her as possible, looking at his sister as if she's diseased.

DANIEL

Excuse me?

Emily slowly raises her head to look at Daniel. Her face is void of emotion, almost doll-like. Her voice is distant, echoes from a memory.

EMILY

Have you ever wanted to die?

CUT TO:

INT. BAR - PRESENT DAY

Daniel finishes a glass of whiskey on the rocks. He stares at the empty glass, watching as the ice begins to melt.

A COUPLE is at the bar, laughing, hands on each other's waists. The bar is not well lit. A MAN walks by Daniel, giving a double take at the young man who appears to be losing it, and shakes his head: kids these days.

Daniel glances up at the BARTENDER, raising his glass slightly to indicate he wants another drink. The bartender grabs a bottle off the shelf behind him and pours him more whiskey.

CUT TO:

INT. EMILY'S BEDROOM - FLASHBACK

Daniel takes a step back, confused by his sister's question. Emily continues looking at Daniel, eyes staring unnervingly.

DANIEL

What?

EMILY

Have you ever wanted to die? Have you ever looked at the world and didn't want to be a part of it anymore?

DANIEL

Uhhhh, I'm gonna go with no.

Daniel laughs uncomfortably, unsure of what to make of the situation. He keeps his distance from Emily.

CUT TO:

INT. BAR - PRESENT DAY

Daniel finishes another drink, slamming his empty glass on the bar.

His phone rings. It's Robyn. Her name has a yellow heart next to it, a picture of her making a goofy face appears on the phone screen. Daniel hits ignore, the phone goes dark.

CUT TO:

INT. EMILY'S BEDROOM - FLASHBACK

Emily stands up, still staring at her brother. Her eyes have no light in them.

EMILY

I don't want to live.

Daniel glances around nervously, uncomfortable in his own house.

DANIEL

Are you sick or something? I can grab mom real quick.

CUT TO:

INT. BAR - PRESENT DAY

Daniel's phone reads seven missed calls from Robyn. He finishes another drink, slamming the glass on the bar. The bartender pours him another cautiously.

Daniel stares at the glass for a moment, his head spinning. He's not doing well. He picks up the glass with a shaky hand and drinks.

The bartender looks at Daniel nervously, glancing around at the rest of the bar to see if anyone has noticed. The man from earlier sits at a table reading a newspaper. The couple from the end of the bar are now playing pool.

No one cares.

CUT TO:

INT. EMILY'S BEDROOM - FLASHBACK

Emily, still staring directly at her brother, takes his hand in hers.

EMILY

You can't help me.

CUT TO:

INT. BAR - PRESENT DAY

Daniel finishes his drink, resting his head on the bar. The bartender comes over and shakes Daniel's shoulder.

BARTENDER

Hey man, do I need to call an Uber for you or something? You don't look too great.

Daniel's phone rings. It's Robyn again.

CUT TO:

INT. EMILY'S BEDROOM

The flashback is dissolving into a nightmare, the edges of the frame are dark. Emily's face has shifted, still gaunt, but not weak. She is menacing. Her eyes are cold and dark.

EMILY

You can't help me Daniel.

CUT TO:

INT. BAR

Daniel is only mildly conscious. The bartender continues to shake his shoulder.

BARTENDER

Come on man, do you have someone I
can call?

Daniel groggily lifts his head, glancing at his phone.

DANIEL

Robyn...

CUT TO:

NIGHTMARE

Swirls of smoky darkness gather around Daniel, like tentacles encapsulating him. Wind blows furiously behind Emily, whose eyes have turned red.

EMILY

You can't help me, because I'm
already dead.

Emily's neck twists to an impossible angle. Her body appears to be broken and bruised. Dried blood appears on her head. She looks like a walking corpse.

CUT TO:

INT. BAR

Everything is blurry. Time is moving slowly, as if through a haze. The bartender is on Daniel's phone. He's concerned. Daniel does not appear to be conscious.

Sirens are heard faintly. Red and white flashing lights pour in from the windows.

CUT TO:

NIGHTMARE

Daniel is fully enveloped in darkness. Emily's broken body stumbles towards where he's being held. Daniel tries to scream, but no sound emerges.

EMILY

I'm dead Daniel. You didn't help
me. You didn't help me.

Daniel wrestles against the dark tendrils. Emily stumbles closer to Daniel, smiling to reveal sharpened teeth. She laughs. It feels as if the world is shaking, building like a volcano about to erupt.

A dark figure appears behind Emily, who seems to be the source of the tentacles. The CREATURE, a ghost-like monster made of smoke and darkness, wraps it's tentacles around Emily, engulfing her in the black smoke. It moves closer to Daniel, a pair of red eyes begin to glow within the smoke. A hooded cloak forms around the glowing eyes.

Daniel closes his eyes: this is the end.

The shaking stops.

Daniel's eyes open.

Everything has become quiet and bright. Emily's face has returned to normal, her eyes no longer red, but instead full of emotion. She looks at her brother urgently, her eyes begging for help.

EMILY (CONT'D)

But you can help me now.

DARKNESS.

People are yelling at one another incoherently. It sounds as if they're far away, like on the other end of a crowded hallway. The BEEPS of medical equipment break through the sound of voices.

Light seeps in. Daniel blinks slowly, revealing...

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Daniel is being pushed down a hallway on a gurney. Everything is bright and blurry. A young DOCTOR, female, mid thirties, Indian, is on the right side of the gurney.

He looks down at Daniel, then motions to someone behind him. He yells something, but it's muddled, as if being heard underwater. Daniel looks around groggily, glancing to his left.

Robyn is on the left side of the gurney. She takes Daniel's hand in hers.

ROBYN
(Almost inaudible)
Daniel!

Daniel blinks a few more times slowly, his heart pounding in his ears.

ROBYN (CONT'D)
(A little louder)
Daniel!

Daniel's eyes close, his head falls to the side. The BEEPS of medical equipment quicken in tempo.

ROBYN (CONT'D)
(Yelling)
DANIEL!

SCENE 4

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Daniel's eyes snap open. There is silence. He blinks slowly, taking in his surroundings.

Daniel lies on a bed in a darkened hospital room. He looks down to the IV in his arm, following the tube to the pack of fluids hanging by his bedside. A small bedside table holds a notepad and pen, along with a call button for assistance.

An infomercial plays quietly on a television in the corner. Robyn sits curled up in an armchair, fast asleep, a cup of coffee and half eaten sandwich sit on a table near the chair. She twists around in the chair, mumbling softly as she sleeps.

Daniel grabs the pen and paper and starts writing frantically. Robyn stirs in the chair, opening her eyes slowly.

ROBYN
Daniel?

Daniel continues to write. Robyn gets up and approaches him cautiously.

ROBYN (CONT'D)
Are you alright? I was really
worried about you.

Daniel shuts his eyes, as if he's trying to remember something. Robyn sits on the edge of the hospital bed and places her hand on his shoulder.

ROBYN (CONT'D)

Daniel, what's wrong? It's not like you to pull a stunt like this.

Daniel looks up from the notebook and stares directly into Robyn's eyes. His eyes are wide and frantic; haunted.

DANIEL

I saw Emily.

Robyn tries to pull Daniel into a hug, but he pushes her away, again turning to the notepad to scribble fervently. Robyn get up off the bed, standing over Daniel, trying to get a better look at the notebook.

Daniel sketches the black monster that appeared behind Emily. Robyn takes a couple steps back.

ROBYN

What is that?

DANIEL

It has Emily. And I can help her, I just need to know what it is.

ROBYN

Daniel... Emily is gone. There's nothing you can do.

Daniel throws the notebook across the room, turning to Robyn sharply.

DANIEL

That's not true!

Robyn ducks to avoid the notebook flying towards her face. She looks back at Daniel, noticeably shaken. Daniel takes a deep breath. His tone is even and serious; he means what he says.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

I saw her, and I know I can help her. She's captured and I finally know how to reach her because he told me everything.

ROBYN

You know you're not making any sense, right? Emily died, and nothing you do will change that.

(MORE)

ROBYN (CONT'D)

No one has her, she's not hiding.
She's just gone.

DANIEL

I know it sounds crazy, but I
wouldn't be saying this if I didn't
think it was real.

Robyn retrieves the notebook from the floor and stares at the disturbing drawing. She looks up at Daniel, who has begun to tear up.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

I know I can save her.

ROBYN

What did he tell you?

DANIEL

What?

Robyn sits on the edge of the hospital bed and gives the notebook back to Daniel. She takes his hand in hers.

ROBYN

You said he told you everything.
Who did? When did this happen? What
did he tell you?

Daniel looks back at the creature he drew and takes a deep breath.

DANIEL

I guess it was while I passed out.
And I saw him.

INT. DARK PLACE - FLASHBACK

Daniel stands in the middle of what appears to be a swirling black cloud. Visibility is low as a shadowy figure emerges from the swirling darkness. It is the same figure that appeared behind Emily, the same figure that Daniel drew in the notebook.

DANIEL (V.O.)

I had no idea where I was, but I
saw him, dark and swirling.
Chaotic. And then I saw Emily.

The creature's smoke-like tentacles move forward, revealing Emily in their grasp. She looks like a rag doll: pale, limp, and unmoving.

DANIEL

What have you done to her!

The creature's voice is raspy, and echoes throughout the space.

CREATURE

Just what she wanted me to do.

Daniel runs towards Emily's body, only for it to pulled away from him. The creature reappears behind Daniel.

CREATURE (CONT'D)

You cannot reach her. Not yet anyways.

DANIEL

What do you mean?

The creature glides rapidly towards Daniel. A pair of yellow glowing eyes appear, growing bigger as they move towards Daniel.

CREATURE

She wanted this, she asked for this darkness, she asked for me to take her away.

DANIEL

That's not true! Emily would have never asked for this.

The creature circles Daniel, almost mockingly. As he moves, Emily is revealed standing behind him. She stare straight ahead, completely motionless, like a porcelain doll.

CREATURE

You never listened to her. She was begging me to take her, take her away from the people that didn't care enough about her, take her away from a world that only caused her pain. I helped her.

At these words, Emily smiles, but something seems off, like the smile is forced. There is still emptiness behind her eyes. She is a shell of what she used to be.

CREATURE (CONT'D)

I took her in where no one could hurt her, where she could feel nothing.

Daniel walks over to Emily hesitantly, placing his hand on her shoulder. She has no reaction, her face is stuck in that false smile, eyes lifeless.

DANIEL

Then... is she at peace?

CREATURE

Peace? Peace does not exist here, only nothingness. She is nothing, just like she believed she was, just like she wanted to be.

FADE TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Daniel looks at his drawing of the creature. Tears fall softly down his face.

DANIEL

I don't know what is true, or what I can believe, but if there's a way Emily can find peace, I'm going to do that for her.

Robyn, lifts Daniel's chin with her fingers, moving his eye line to meet hers.

ROBYN

Emily had plenty of struggles in life, most of which went unnoticed. And you want to help her, I can see that. I just don't know how you can.

DANIEL

I do.

CUT TO:

SCENE 5

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

The DOCTOR has just finished checking in on Daniel. Robyn sits in the armchair in the corner of the room. The doctor jots down some notes on a clipboard before passing the to the NURSE, late fifties, black male.

DOCTOR

Your vitals are looking good, but you're still fairly dehydrated, so I think we're going to keep you overnight to make sure everything checks out before you leave.

DANIEL

Sounds good, thanks.

DOCTOR

You're welcome. Also, here's a contact for the hospital counselor. Drinking to solve a problem is going to do a lot more to hurt you than to help you. They may be able to give some guidance.

The doctor pushes a business card into Daniel's hand. Daniel sets it on the bedside table.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

The nurse will be back in a few hours, but if you need anything, don't hesitate to call for us.

Daniel nods his head. The doctor and nurse leave the room. Robyn stands up and cautiously locks the door, moving the arm chair in front of the door to block it.

ROBYN

I really don't like this.

DANIEL

I don't care. It's what needs to be done.

ROBYN

I loved Emily too you know, but trying to kill yourself seems a little extreme, don't you think!

DANIEL

It's the only way to get to her!

Daniel holds out his hand to Robyn, motioning his fingers as if to say "give it to me"

ROBYN

There's no use in talking you out of this.

Robyn reaches into her back pocket and pulls out a scalpel. She hands it to Daniel.

ROBYN (CONT'D)
I'm not watching you do this.

DANIEL
But I need you to be there if
things go poorly.

Robyn grabs the hospital gown under Daniel's neck, pulling
his face closer to hers..

ROBYN
And what if things go poorly??

At these words, Robyn begin to cry. Daniel pulls Robyn in for
a kiss. He positions the scalpel over his wrist.

DANIEL
I'm coming back to you, I promise.

Daniel winks at Robyn who turns her back on him: I can't
watch this. Daniel's face winces in pain.

A drop of blood hits the hospital room floor. The beeping of
medical equipment fades.

INT. DARK PLACE

Daniel opens his eyes, blinking a few times among the
swirling darkness. He pushes himself up on his elbows and
looks around. The creature is nowhere to be seen. Emily sits
on the floor about 20 feet from Daniel. Her back is facing
him.

Daniel bolts up and runs to his sister. He grabs her
shoulders and turns her around. Her head hangs down, she is
unresponsive.

Daniel shakes Emily's shoulders, glancing around for any sign
of the creature.

DANIEL
(Whispering)
Emily! Emily, please wake up. It's
Daniel! I'm getting you out of
here.

Emily does not respond. She appears to be lifeless, like a
rag doll.

Daniel carefully scoops up Emily in his arms bridal style and
frantically looks around for any exit. The swirling fog gets
darker, moving faster and more chaotically. A small opening
in the fog appears opposite of where Daniel is standing.

He tightens his grip on Emily's body, pulling her closer to his chest and makes a run for it.

Before Daniel reaches the opening, he is yanked back by dark tendrils. He falls to the ground, Emily's body lands on top of his. He cradles Emily in his arms, protecting her from the tendrils.

CREATURE (O.S.)

There is no escaping this place
Daniel.

Daniel turns around to see the creature gliding towards him, tendrils of smoke drifting off of its body.

CREATURE (CONT'D)

No one ever truly leave.

Daniel sets Emily on the ground gingerly and stands up to face the creature.

DANIEL

She doesn't want to be here. She
deserves peace.

The creature swoops over to Emily, lifting her chin with one of the tendrils gently. She opens her eyes slightly, looking at her brother.

EMILY

Daniel? What are you doing here?

Daniel bends down to meet Emily's eyes, only to be stopped by the creature. It picks up Daniel in its tendrils, looping them around his body tightly, and holds Daniel in the air above his sister

DANIEL

Emily!
(To creature)
Put me down, let me talk to her!

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM

Robyn paces around the hospital room anxiously. She checks the time on her phone. It reads 12:24. She puts the phone back in her pocket and continues to pace.

Daniel's body twitches a few times on the hospital bed. Robyn runs over to him and holds his hand.

ROBYN

Come on Daniel. You can do this.

CUT TO:

INT. DARK PLACE

Daniel wrestles against the tendrils, but it's no use. Emily stands up groggily and looks up at her brother. She reaches out her hand, but pulls it away.

EMILY

Why are you here?

DANIEL

I'm trying to help you! To get you out of this place.

Emily laughs softly, her eyes getting darker. She takes a few steps away from Daniel, moving as if she's a broken marionette.

EMILY

You came to help me? It's a little too late for that.

Emily turns her back on Daniel, sitting back on the ground.

DANIEL

Emily, I'm sorry I didn't try to help you while you were still alive. I just didn't know!

Emily turns around sharply, gliding close to her brother, spitting in his face. There is something dark and primal behind her words.

EMILY

You didn't know? Or you didn't care?

Emily turns to the creature and nods. The creature releases Daniel, setting him on the ground.

EMILY (CONT'D)

(To creature)

Leave us.

The creature glides away. The swirling darkness becomes lighter, less ominous. Daniel looks around, confused.

DANIEL

You can control that thing?

Emily sits back down on the floor. Daniel sits next to her.
The darkness continues to subside.

EMILY

At times. Other times it seems to
control me.

The pair sit in silence for a moment, both trying to figure
out what to say. The swirling darkness has disappeared,
revealing a plain white room with a single door.

EMILY (CONT'D)

It was right about one thing
though. We can't ever leave.

Emily turns to face Daniel, her eyes no longer dark, her
demeanor no longer doll-like. She looks alive.

DANIEL

We might as well try.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM

Daniel's body is going through shock. Robyn removes the chair
that's blocking the door and unlocks it. She rushes to
Daniel's side and presses the call button for the nurse.

ROBYN

I'm sorry love, but I can't just
sit by and let you fall apart.

Robyn grabs some gauze and begins dressing Daniel's wounds.

ROBYN (CONT'D)

HELP!

CUT TO:

INT. DARK PLACE

Emily stands up and takes a few step away from her brother.

EMILY

You can't be serious.

Daniel stands up and takes his sister's hands in his.

DANIEL

You don't deserve this. You deserve
peace. Let's make a run for it.

EMILY
You know that won't bring me back.
And it could kill you.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM

The doctor has arrived with a few nurses. One of the nurses is doing chest compressions, while another is prepping a syringe of some sort.

DOCTOR
What happened?

ROBYN
I went out to grab something to eat
and when I came back...

Robyn takes a step away from Daniel. She can't bear to vocalize what he's done.

CUT TO:

INT. DARK PLACE

Daniel steps back; he hadn't thought of that. All of a sudden, the swirling darkness emerges. The creature appears behind Emily.

Daniel stands his ground, prepared to fight. Emily walks up to him and places her hand on his shoulder.

EMILY
Daniel, I don't need you to fight
my demons. I think you need to
fight your own.

Emily points behind Daniel, where the door is open. Light pours out of it. Daniel looks at the open door, then back at Emily.

DANIEL
I thought you wanted me to help
you.

EMILY
I don't know if I can be helped.

Daniel takes Emily's hand in his.

DANIEL
Well, let's try.

Daniel winks at Emily. Emily glances over her shoulder at the creature, who is motionless. Emily nods at Daniel, and the two make a run for the door.

At once, the creature spring into action, reaching it's tendrils for Emily's ankles.

Emily and Daniel quicken their pace. As they reach the door, the creature lunges for Emily. Daniel intercedes, and the tendril grabs his ankle instead. Before Emily can say anything, Daniel pushes her through the open door.

DANIEL (CONT'D)
I love you Emily.

Emily looks back at Daniel, worried, before disappearing on the other side of the door. The creature screams in agony.

CREATURE
You fool! You have sacrificed your
life for what? Nothing will bring
her back, and now you're through!

Daniel scrambles to his feet. The door begins to close. Daniel makes a run for the door as the creature shoots another tendril in his direction, tripping him and making him fall to the ground. The door is almost shut.

At the last second, a foot appears in the doorway, propping it open. Emily's hand reaches through the cracked door..

DANIEL
I'm not done living yet.

Daniel pushes himself up, grabbing his sister's hand. The creature flies towards him. He pushes the door open and steps to the other side. Emily shuts the door.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM

Daniel bolts up in the hospital bed. Robyn and a nurse are by his bedside.

NURSE
It's okay Daniel, it'll be alright.

Daniel sits back in the hospital bed. Robyn takes his hand and leans close to his ear.

ROBYN
(Whispering)
Did you save her?

Daniel nods before drifting off to sleep. The heart monitor remains steady. Robyn looks at the nurse, who smiles and nods as if to say "he'll be alright."

Robyn rubs the back of Daniel's hand as the nurse leaves the room.

Music swells. A happy ending.

FADE TO:

DARKNESS.

Muffled screams and urgent whispers swirl softly. Nothing is distinguishable. A young girl's voice stands out, whispering...

EMILY
Daniel... Daniel...

The voice fades, replacing by the creature's laughter. It grows, more chaotic, until...

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING

Daniel's eyes snap open. The laughter is replaced by Daniel's heavy breathing.

Nightmares

Treatment, [April 2018]

Sarah James

Logline

A college student feels guilty as he struggles to face his sister's suicide. Haunted by her memory, he must find a way out of his overwhelming nightmares in order to save her soul.

Characters

Daniel - A graduate student who suffers from night terrors after his sister commits suicide

Robyn - Daniel's supportive girlfriend who is also a Registered Nurse

Emily - Daniel's younger sister who committed suicide after suffering from severe depression for years

Creature - Physical manifestation of Emily's depression; is holding Emily's soul captive

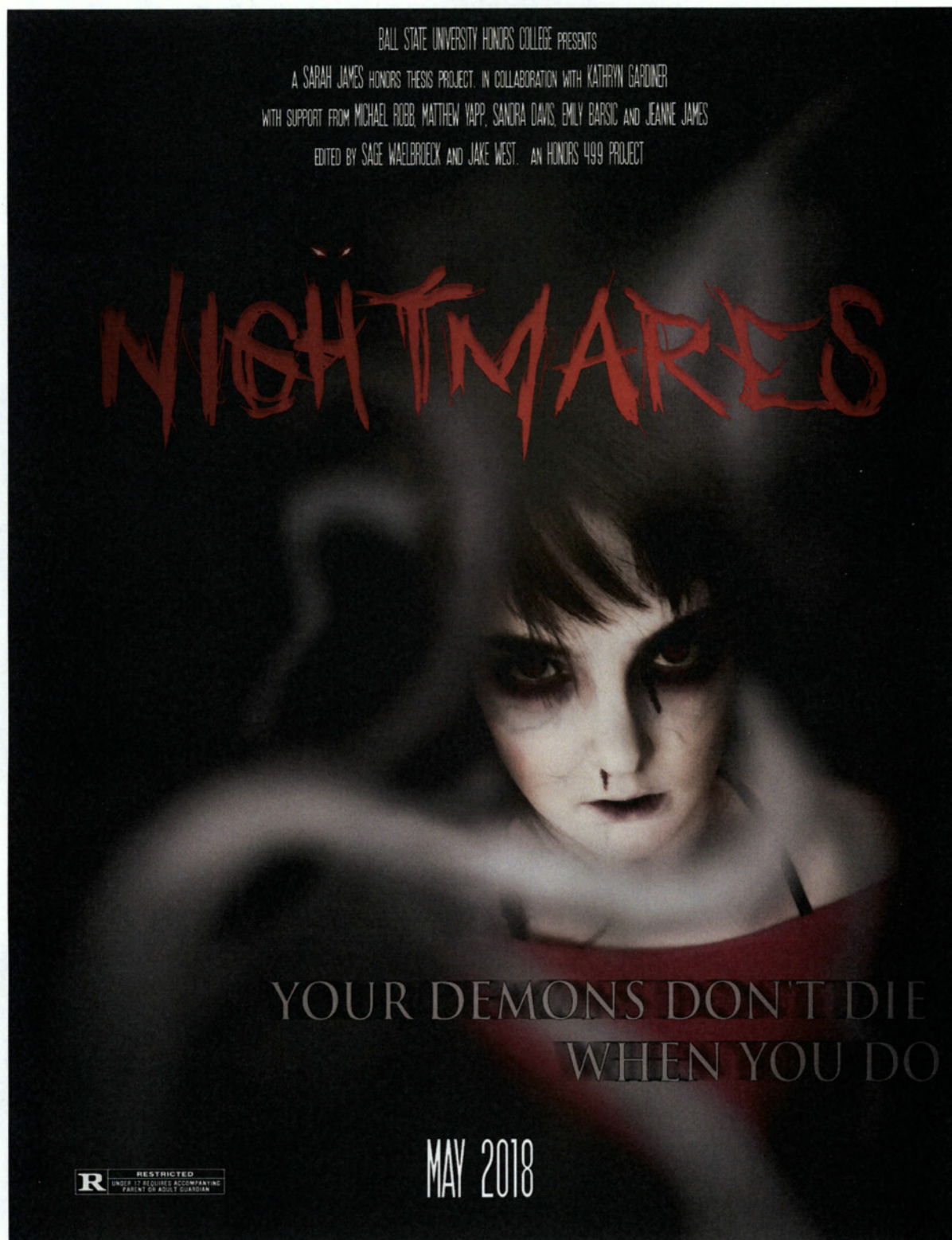
Synopsis

DANIEL wakes up after having yet another nightmare about his sister, EMILY. He goes to a counselor to try to get rid of his nightmares, but his sessions do not help. When confronted by his girlfriend, ROBYN, about his grief, Daniel explodes, leaving his apartment and going to a bar.

Daniel drinks an excessive amount at the bar as he reminisces on a moment he had with Emily before she died. His memory goes awry and is interrupted by a dark CREATURE, who seems to be possessing Emily. Daniel is rushed to the hospital after drinking too much.

He awakens only to realize that he can save Emily from the creature by attempting to take his own life. In the end, he saves Emily's soul, but has inherited his own demons.

Movie Poster Prototype



Storyboards:

STORY BOARD: NIGHTMARES: SCENE 3
shots 1-15

1



ELS. Daniel walks down street

2



MS. Daniel walking

3



MCU. Daniel looks @ bar

4



MS. Bar exterior

5



LS. Daniel enters bar

6

FLASHBACK



LS. Daniel walks by

7



CU. Emily

8



MS. Daniel backtracks

9



LS. Emily

10

PRESENT DAY



ECU. Whiskey

11



CU. Daniel

12



MS. Bartender

13



LS. Bar

14



MS. 'Another

15



MS. Bartender

shots 16-30



CU. Whiskey pours



FLASH BACK

MS Daniel @ door



ECU. Emily "Have you ever?"



MLS. Daniel



PRESENT DAY

MS. Daniel finishes drink



CU. Phone



Flash back

MLS. OTS @ Emily



MS. OTS @ Daniel



PRESENT DAY

CU. Phone



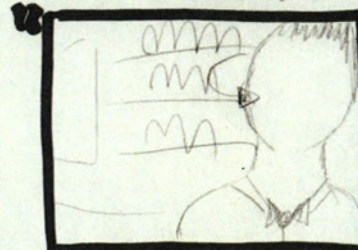
CU. Daniel finishes drink



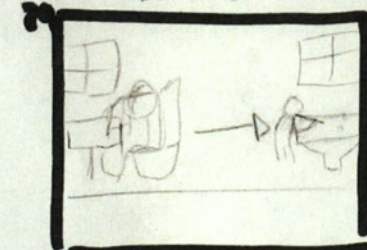
MLS. Bartender



MS. Daniel w/ drink



MS. Bar tender



LS. Bar



FLASH BACK

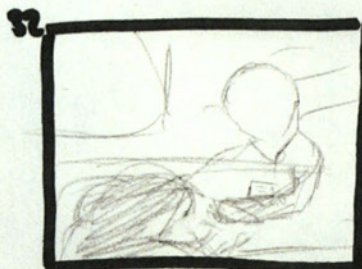
MLS + MS Emily's Daniel

shots 31-45

PRESENT DAY



MCU. Daniel finishes drink



MS. Bartender "Hey man"



CU. Phone

FR-NIGHTMARE



MS. Emily "You can't"



MS. Bartender



CU. Daniel

NIGHTMARE



MS. Emily w/ darkness



MS. Emily "You can't"

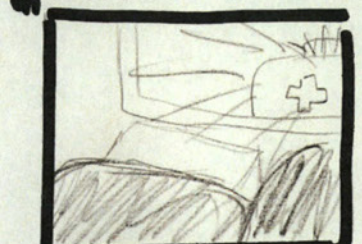


MS. Emily distorted

REAL LIFE



MS. Bartender on phone



CU. Back of Daniel's head



MS. Daniel w/ darkness

3



MS. Emily "I'm dead"



LS. Camera circles



CU. Emily "But you can't"

Documentation of Sources

Kent, Jennifer. *The Babadook*. Screenway Australia, 17 Jan. 2014.

Wolfelt, Alan D.. *Depression of Grief : Coping with Your Sadness and Knowing When to Get Help*, Companion Press, 2014. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/bsu-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1584217>.

Worden, J. William. *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy: a Handbook for the Mental Health Practitioner*. 4th ed., Springer Publishing Company, LLC, 2018.

Appendices:

APPENDIX A - Original Detailed Treatment

LOGLINE:

An overworked and highly stressed grad student is haunted by his sister's spirit, and must find a way out of his overwhelming nightmares in order to save her soul.

SEVEN PLOT POINTS:

1. Backstory - Daniel's younger sister, Emily, suffered from depression for many years before committing suicide. Daniel blames himself for not being able to help her.
2. Catalyst - Daniel has recurring nightmares in where his sister asks for his help.
3. Big Event - Daniel passes out drunk, has a nightmare in where he sees Emily trapped by a demon, wakes up in hospital
4. Midpoint - Daniel realizes that the only way to reach his sister and the demon capturing her is to be on the brink of death
5. Crisis - Daniel and Robyn find a way to induce a coma, Robyn believes she can bring Daniel back
6. Showdown - Once unconscious, Daniel confronts the demon, offers himself to take her place, demon lets Emily go before realizing he can't trap Daniel because Daniel still wants to live
7. Realization - Daniel has a greater understanding of mental illness, grateful for his sister's safety even though his nightmares continue

THREE-ACT BREAKDOWN:

Act One:

Daniel wakes up, writes in journal about nightmare
Montage of school day
Counselor appointment
 Introduction to Emily's suicide
 Description of recurring nightmare
Conversation with Robyn about how counseling isn't helping
Backstory on Emily
Demon Nightmare

Act Two:

Daniel wakes up in hospital
Explains nightmare to Robyn
Connect with suicide survivor who met the demon
Discovers that the way to confront the demon is to be near
 death on your own accord
Robyn hatches plan to send Daniel into a coma with the
 chance to revive him
Daniel slips into coma

Act Three:

Confrontation with demon
Offers to take Emily's place so her soul can rest
Demon agrees and then realizes that Daniel tricked him
Demon lets Daniel go, saying that they will see each other
 again
Daniel wakes up to see Robyn, Emily's soul is at rest
Daniel goes to sleep that night only to find that the demon
 is still in his nightmares, telling Daniel that he is
 next

CHARACTER PROFILES:

Daniel- hero

- Grad student majoring in music production
- Goal - to rescue his sister's soul
- Backstory - Was indifferent about mental illness before his sister committed suicide; supportive of his sister, but not a huge part of her life; has always been really focused on his music

Creature- villain

- Captures souls of suicide victim; analogy for mental illness
- Goal- to imprison Emily's soul
- Backstory- invades the dreams of those who think about death and tempts them to join him

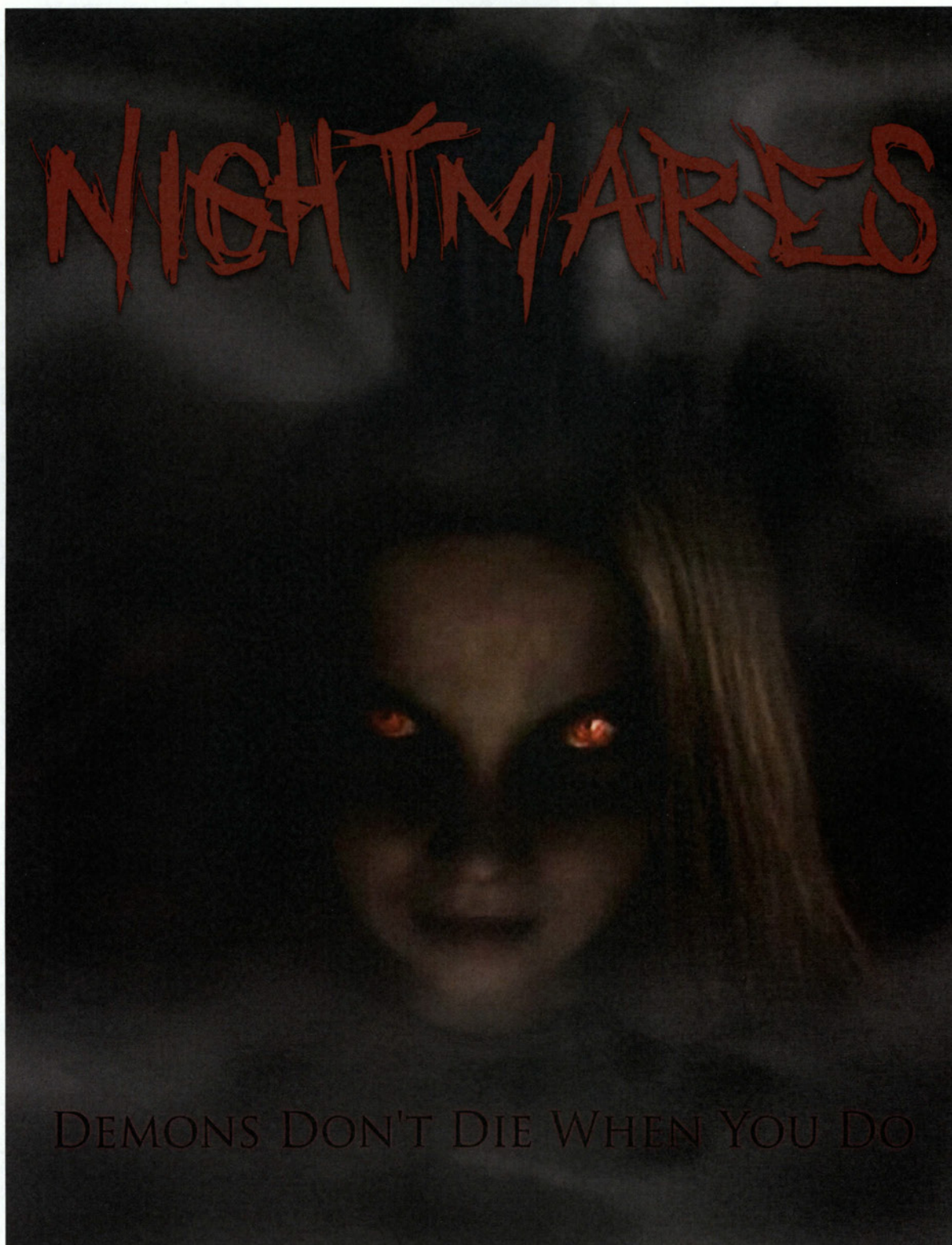
Emily- damsel

- Victim of suicide whose soul is trapped by a demon
- Goal- to rest
- Backstory- suffered from depression for years; tried to tell her family only to get indifference
- Who was she on her good days?

Robyn- clever sidekick

- Daniel's girlfriend who's in med school
- Goal- to stop Daniel's nightmares
- Backstory- grew up with Daniel; empathetic to those with mental illness, someone in her life that died from suicide?

Appendix B - First Movie Poster Prototype



Appendix C - Original drawn concept art



